

WA Commingled Improvements Project: Southwest Region Workgroup

April 29, 2009, Ecology HQ, 12:30 – 4:00

Outcomes & Notes

Outcomes in determining how to move forward:

Objective: Address contamination and material loss in single-family residential commingled curbside recycling programs in the Southwest Region

Method: Fact-finding Mission

- Track each commodity type to answer the following:
 - How is it acting in the system?
 - What is its potential for cross-contamination?
 - Where does it end up?
 - What is its final use?
 - How much is actually getting recycling (%) and at what quality?
- Track non-program commodities to answer the following:
 - Type?
 - Percentage?
 - How is it acting in the system?
 - Is it recovered or disposed?

Needs

- All players – Each end user for each commodity
- Get numbers where we can – ballpark #'s okay; existing data only
- Story of material life from curb to end use
- Economic impacts (i.e. plastic bag data from Far West Fibers)

Goals: Seeking the truth in order to:

- Have full knowledge to inform changes to programs
- Provide data, plus story (context), to electeds
- Provide consistency in public education messages (including dangerous items like sharps)
- Reduce MRF problems in sorting
- Create feedback loops, both positive and negative, for the system as a whole
- Identify possible funding mechanisms for increased public education

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Why are you involved in this project?

WRRRA – Represent members who are MRFs and collectors.

LeMay (Pierce) – System is working well. Not in favor of standards—prefer recommendations. Curb is good, MRF struggles. Education is strong and important. Variance between local government programs is okay.

SP – Support counties/cities they process for and haulers. Improve quality coming in.

LeMay (Thurston) – Education effort—multi-language. Prevent contamination in program.

Waste Connections (Clark) – Education piece needs addressed.

Thurston – Residents would be shocked. Too much variety leads to contamination. More consistent programs. Not necessarily standardization. Support end markets—they are the reason we do our work. Adding tubs has been problematic.

Auburn – Three haulers. Consistent education is important. Looking for where to focus. Plastic bags are a huge problem (50% contamination by residents).

Tacoma – MRFs/Mills tell us what you want. Learn from others. Consistency vs. standardization. We are not creating responsible recyclers—education. Can't take away a material once you add.

Vancouver – Is it a processing issue? Is it collection? Is it where the end market is? Hoping discussion leads to solutions.

Nippon – Represent suffering of end users. Is anything really going to happen? Maybe that belief is why others aren't here. If there is a problem, let's act on it. We need to be part of the solution. You may not have end use markets, otherwise.

NORPAC – Ditto. Economic impacts to mills. Mills cutting back on recycled content due to cost of commingled materials/contamination. Move away from focus on tonnage – focus on diversion (value).

Pierce – Problem with consistency due to elected officials' decisions—their job is to represent their citizens. Not realistic to get regional consistency. Risk is different among jurisdictions. Can't specify MRFs if not contracting. Hauler choice is set: contract vs. UTC and back again. Consistency in messaging—common do's and don'ts since we do use the same MRFs. (i.e. plastic bags, shredded paper messaging). Cost is an issue.

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Mason – Cost is an issue. Glass is getting cut—one drop off now. Would like to see a glass rep. here. What would the effects of a bottle bill do? Consistency in region would be great.

Shelton – Listen to learn where the contamination problems are. Provide input from coordinator perspective.

Olympia – Learn more about current situation with glass. Glass enabled us to capture more. Education is doable with other materials. Removing glass would be a major shift (labor, investment) –need triple bottom line data. Simple to educate on 3 streams (recycling, organics and garbage). Issue with too many carts in alleys. Standardize colors of carts per stream (i.e. green = organics).

Make it easy for customer. Likes idea of standards—needs to go beyond city/county. More like I-5 corridor so it is very consistent. Need good feedback loop. What *is* recyclable? Customers are confused on plastics with the addition of tubs. Clear messages back to customers. Role/impact of working under electeds.

Clark – Shadow of Portland media. Metro is ahead in MRF work—resulted in cooperation in customer education. Able to use contracts for collections and processing. Cooperation is key. Focus on *why* we provide this service. Might need to adjust in our reliance on China for end use markets—shift back to a local market might be needed.

Other comments echoed by group:

- Want to see more end users involved in the project
- Changes in fiber use and markets
- Local mills may not be here when we need them most (i.e. absent China's high demand market)
- State of economy provides opportunities to change our programs
- Staff are experts to advise elected on needed changes